



# Man of Many Faces: 777

***The True Story of a Fictional Man***

**By Campbell Poor**

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## **Foreword**

Many times throughout the day I recall memories from this particular story. Although it seems off of the wall and consistently inconsistent, the fact that it is somewhat a true story shocks most who learn about the many tales of Darrius Washington. “The True Story of a Fictional Man” isn’t just the newest label for fiction, it shows the fact that none of the story was made up, even though the main character and most other characters don’t actually exist. This may seem confusing, however Darrius Washington and the many other characters and events that surround him do technically exist, just in the virtual world. All of the stories surrounding him actually took place, however some details are obviously stretched to make the story a bit more than “Bad man go crazy kill people” for obvious reasons. Hope you enjoy:



## Chapter 1: How...Exactly...Did We Get to Mexico?

The night had a strange feel to it, almost as if I had done something I wasn't supposed to.

It seemed strange that CJ hadn't answered, however I chalked it up to ignorance. After all, he had just gotten back from the game in Mexico City. I had wanted to watch in-person, but I feared

the fact that I would have to appear in front of the fans and be revered for my time there, playing for the Golden Eagles, however I simply couldn't stomach the idea of a national audience watching a ceremony with me in the middle. I had become a shell of myself, and even though every now and then I look through my boxes of trophies and awards and wonder, "Am I still the same person I was all of those years ago?" and the answer, to me at least, is no.

The alarm clock caught me by surprise, however the pouring rain on my window quickly eased any stresses I had previously encountered. I had never been able to comprehend living through a drought, as living in Washington State meant I had to learn to live with the rain as a friend of mine. In all 21 years, 5 months, and 3 days of my life, I had never woken up so nervous. The most important day of my life was ahead, and even though there was so much certainty to my standing among the class, I still held so much uncertainty about where I would be selected. Would I have to move to the East Coast, somewhere near the Pacific, or would I manage to stay in Washington with Seattle? I knew I would find the answer later in the day, but I still couldn't shake the feeling that something would go terribly wrong within the day.

I arrived at the bus stop, however since I was dressed to go ahead of all of the country, I stood out like a sore thumb. The stares I garnered from the many people not as fortunate as me put me into a negative state of mind, why should I even be here? What have I done that puts me so far ahead of the average person just trying to commute on an average Tuesday? I recognized this and attempted to keep my head low in order to try and ignore them staring, leading me to slam my head into the doorframe of the bus. Their disgust at my apparent need to show off quickly turned to laughter, and I rushed into my seat and put on my headphones in an attempt to

drown out the noises. It would be a long ride, as the venue holding the draft was a long ways away from Pullman, the town I grew up and rose to national stardom in. I used these final hours of “normal” life to reflect on how I got here, how I reached the national stage, and how I would be able to handle it. I had seen what it had done to my father, as even though he lived in infamy for almost committing a homicide on the court, that was not a rare occurrence outside of the public eye, and within our home.

I began to doze off, wondering how exactly I would respond to the many questions I was likely to have to answer throughout the day. It wouldn’t be my first, nor my last interview, but these had the potential to send my value in the draft upwards, or the potential to send my career down the drain. I made sure to remember the many mental notes I had made in preparation for the occasion. I had to remember them, or else my mind would drift during the conversation, something I knew would lead to an interview becoming a nightmare. I wouldn’t say I was fearful of the situation, I just had no idea what I was in for, as the experience I was in for would change my perception of just about everything around me, and nothing could have possibly prepared me for that. In my mind, the phrases I knew I would be asked kept repeating in my mind, and the moment I finally gave up on trying to answer them, I fell asleep.

The shaking of the bus woke me, and just on time, as we had reached Seattle. I had failed to account for the fact that I would still have to cover 2 miles in 15 minutes, though a city, and in a suit. As I speed walked as fast as possible through the streets, weaving through crowds of people, I realized two things, the first being that everyone else, even players considered well

below my talent level, were all partying on a bus, while I practically ran through the street. The second thought was something nowhere near as important or demoralizing, it was simply me forgetting that not everyone around me was a freak athlete, leaving me once again, standing out among the crowd. Just before I crossed the road, as I waited for a car to cross, someone recognized me. Then another, a few more, and within seconds I had been surrounded by a crowd looking for autographs and pictures. I could do nothing to get them to move away from me, as they continued to follow me until I finally reached the building where my life would change forever.

I knew that Portland having the first two picks gave me a great chance of staying in the Pacific Northwest, however as the newly relocated River Hogs were put on the clock, the draft pundits simply couldn't stop talking about the phenom quarterbacks from the same college not too far from mine, Washington. I had faced, dominated, and defeated both of them, however my name wasn't mentioned once in their raving about them and their potential. Portland put in their first pick, unsurprisingly they took the "sure thing" in Trent Linsley, however since they had the pick right after, I hoped that the phone just a few feet away from me would ring, and give me the best news of my life, however I was passed on for the only man in the draft class with more pure athleticism, Justice Applewhite. As I pondered on how exactly he got such a name, the other high-profile player from Washington, Devonte Carroll, went to St. Louis, leaving the also newly relocated Mexico City Golden Eagles on the clock. I began to daydream, wondering when my time would come. I looked at the phone, in wonder, and as I turned to look away, it rang.

Trying to remember what happened after is difficult, as the rush of euphoria I felt is hard to explain in words. All of the next few hours and interviews later became a blur, and my

memory of the day comes back to me once I step back into my hotel room, which I had built into a temporary sanctuary, hoping to try and keep myself calm throughout the commotion of draft night. It was getting late, and by the time I decided I needed to sleep, another call came in. It was from a friend of mine I hadn't spoken to in years. Ever since he went off to the only college that gave him any kind of scholarship offer, we had essentially signed a contract of silence, surprising me even more that he called out of the blue like this. His tone seemed off, like something was on his mind, and a few minutes later he told me, "I just wanted to get this off of my chest, you know how the Golden Eagles had so many options with the 4th pick, and saw you as the best talent by far in the class? They called me, yes, me, and said that they believe I'm some sort of hidden gem that they found within the later rounds of the draft. I hope they aren't lying, I really do. It's been a while since we've talked, but us being together on the same team seems like a dream too good to be true." and as history goes, it was not too good to be true.

I was still in the hotel during the following days, and sure enough, with the 6th pick in the 5th round, Dimitri Hurts of Texas Tech was selected by the Mexico City Golden Eagles. Once again, Dimitri called, now with his family around him, chanting and shouting his name. It made me happy yet jealous. One of my closest friends that I hadn't spoken with in years had his dream come true surrounded by his family, while I was alone in a room surrounded by other draftees, with no family to speak of. It made me feel something I truly hadn't felt before, I mean, I knew it existed, but the concept of loneliness had been foreign to me up until that moment. After the call ended with his phone cutting out due to his grandma tripping over the surge protector that powered the wifi router, I realized I needed to spend some time reflecting on how I got to this point. It all began so innocently, just living a normal life, at least, as normal as it was to me.

My father was an NBA player best known for nearly killing a man, and then being locked up for charity fraud. Sometimes I wished I had grown up in place of my cousin, CJ, better known outside of the public spotlight as Cassius James Washington.

He was about 4 years younger than me, and although I was seen as the complete package in terms of athleticism and size, he was seen as the next big phenom in just his first year of highschool. He was a decent bit smaller than me, still well above average, however his incredible speed and smarts made almost every analyst rate him higher than I had been rated. Everytime I went to one of his games to watch him, at least, while I wasn't surrounded by fans looking to get my autograph on fake Washington State hats, I could tell that the coaches hadn't learned from their mistakes when coaching me. They treated him more like an item instead of a person, however he seemed to love being used as a weapon of fear wherever he was. As we were leaving the stadium, we had a conversation about his future, needless to say, it ended with him going home in the car and me having to run a half-marathon back.

As I ran through the now abandoned streets, trying to reduce my speed to a jog so as to not look suspicious, a group of people began to appear ahead of me. It was strange, as they kept appearing and disappearing, but each time they did this, they would slowly inch towards me. I entered a state of panic, but the faster I moved back the closer they got. By the time I reached full speed I could feel them breathing down my neck, trying to communicate with me. With shivers running down my spine, I made the split-second choice to try and wave down a nearby car. They let me in, and they appeared to be as scared as me. In the following moments, I realized that I had broken into someone's car, and now I had about 4 seconds to get out. Just then, time began to slow down, practically freezing. I got out of the car and began to walk home, trying to dust the

gravel off of my shoes, this time hoping to not go through another encounter with the gang of ghosts that scared me into almost robbing someone. Just then reality came back to me, and I was in the car, next to a visibly annoyed CJ, and my shoes were spotless.

As my mind attempted to drift off to sleep, the words spoken by the voices from that night months ago became clearer in my mind. They still weren't quite understandable, but I knew with time I would know what they said. I had made sure to prepare my bags for my flight to Mexico City the next morning, as I was known within my family as the "last-second packer" and to be fair, they weren't wrong. I wasn't going to let myself forget again, I had everything ready to go for my first time meeting the team. I already had a house to stay at while I was there, as I had already starred in a few commercials, most notably the now iconic Doritos commercial, where I went completely off-script, throwing the bag of chips in my hand at the camera in a fit of rage. I thought in that moment my acting career had ended as soon as it started, however they thought my rage at the cameraman was all for the sake of the commercial's comedic value, which was an answer I pretended to agree with, "it was all planned, all thought out beforehand" was what I remember telling the ecstatic director, who thought I was some sort of comedic genius.

By the time my mind was done with going over all of the events from the last month, I finally dozed off to sleep. I should have done it hours before, but that would have been far too difficult for me, and as the alarm went off, I prepared myself for the second biggest day of my life. There was a knock on my window, and to my surprise, it was a person. At least, I thought it was. It appeared that someone had jumped off of the building and onto the small balcony area my room had, however on further inspection, it turned out to just be a mannequin with a few packets of ketchup. Since the stairs to the roof were right outside my room, I made a run to the

top, in hopes I could catch the ones throwing mannequins off of the roof. Turns out, they never heard me coming, however they heard everything after.

“Please, we didn’t mean to, it was an accident! Leave us alone!” were the words they kept repeating. They didn’t look a day over 16, and my only concern was how exactly they got into this situation. “Nothing better to do than throw ketchup mannequins off of the roof I see. Just get out of here whatever way you came from, besides, the sun is coming up sometime soon.” I said, trying to sound calm. From their panicked reactions and rush to the edge of the building, I must’ve come off differently than I had expected. They began to make an attempt to leap over the edge, and as I went to stop them, it was too late. As I began to peek over the edge of the building, I found that they had simply disappeared. Just then, I jumped back into reality, and the wind from the Pacific Ocean gave me shivers. Once again, I found myself questioning what the separation from reality and these events was, thankfully I found an answer in sleep deprivation. As I made the walk of shame down back to my room, I checked my small balcony area outside to see if the mannequin was still there, and to my surprise, the balcony wasn’t there.

Rushing through the airport seems like a common occurrence for people who travel often, but no movie I know of depicts the sheer amount of time spent waiting in pure agony to board. I found myself needing food, so instead of walking around the airport searching terminal by terminal for anything good, I settled for the cafe just a few feet away from me. As I sat down with my sandwich, I began wondering if one of these “events” would happen again. If it did, hopefully no one would see, as in the case of the hotel. I hoped that the person in the car I robbed was some sort of creation by my mind, and not an actual person. I spent what seemed like an

eternity trying to remember their face, but no matter what I tried, I could only get an outline, no actual structure. By the time I finally gave up on trying to unmask this person I only knew of for a split second, I had finished all of the sandwich, however my drink had gone cold in the time I spent zoning out. Since my flight was delayed due to a harsh thunderstorm outside, I thought that I might as well spend some time looking through the airport for something else to eat, preferably some type of seafood, mainly because at least to my estimates, there wouldn't be much seafood in Mexico City.

After spending hours searching for a decent place to eat, I finally gave up on my search for seafood and made my walk of shame back to the terminal where I planned to sleep for the duration of the delay, which once again left my mind to wander away from reality. I began to slip out of reality as I had done many times before, however this time was different, I managed to catch myself in the act and stop myself, as going through an "event" in a massive airport surrounded by people could jeopardize my career entirely. I could just imagine the headlines: "4th Overall Pick Darrius Washington Arrested After Violent Episode in Seattle Airport" and with that in mind, I made sure to avoid repeating that mistake.

As we began to board the flight, I noticed someone behind me. A younger boy behind me noticed the bright green and red socks I was wearing, trying to get used to the team colors, and tried to get my attention. "Hey, um, I was wondering if...um, you were the guy the Golden Eagles drafted?" He also told me his name, but since I was in such a rush I couldn't answer his question. I made sure to write his name down, "Daymond" I thought he said. He said he was 8, which I

didn't believe, I'd need to see a birth certificate for that. Finally I was settled on the plane, and the stresses I had previously feared melted away, I was finally free.

I slept through most of the flight, figuring I couldn't lose my mind if asleep. I didn't see "Daymond" while getting off the plane, even though a 5 foot 6 eight year old should be pretty easy to spot. I had been practicing my Spanish, however there was no need, because of the massive group of reporters ready to meet me at the gate. I was escorted outside, and put into a car that would take me to the team's facilities, and once we arrived, I was shocked. It was as if they had started building the week before I arrived, half of the roof was missing, the floor was just scrap wood, and there was active construction right outside. I began to regret everything in my life up to that moment, until I remembered that I had to be here for 4 years no matter what.

I began the walk of shame inside, and met a few of the other players there to visit, however one stood out among them, Dimitri Hurts. The old friend of mine was now almost a foot shorter than me, but with blazing speed, he is unstoppable everywhere on the field. We began to introduce ourselves to each other, and that was also when coach Rosier arrived. He had coached Dimitri at Texas Tech, and was brought in to lead our newly relocated team to whatever record he could manage, as we were seen as the consensus worst team in the league that year. Coach Rosier brought a no-nonsense attitude, however even with us not having a single word spoked between us, I could feel he respected each and every one of our skills and abilities. He seemed like a man with a clear plan and vision for the team.

He began to talk to each of us, starting with the seemingly unlimited late round picks, eventually reaching me. "Now onto you, Washington, wait, is that your college or your name?"

It's listed twice?" Fellow first round pick, Kevin Ferguson of Texas, cleared it up before I could even open my mouth to reply. "It's both, he went to Washington State and his last name is Washington. Pretty funny coincidence huh?" He turned to me at the end of the sentence, and I gave him a nod and a stern "don't do that again" look in reply. He didn't sound like he was from Texas, but with how they were raving about him for almost an hour before getting to me must've been incredibly frustrating for the later round's picks, who just wanted to get their first paycheck and get home. One of them, Kai Greenfield, a big man with an even bigger temper, started yelling at the coach out of the blue. However something unforeseen happened, Rosier didn't respond with harsh words or send him out of the building, he told him he appreciated the personality, surprising everyone including Kai.

After we finished the negotiations a few hours later, I began to drive home in the car I rented while waiting for the coach to arrive. I thought back on the contract with a bit of regret, as I would've used the leverage I had to try and get more money, however the stench of whatever they were using outside for construction made me just want to leave, even at the cost of about a million dollars. I finally reached my house, which was somewhat secluded and hidden from those nearby, which were mostly occupied by fellow teammates of mine. They had planned a party of sorts for next week to try and introduce everyone to one another, however I planned on making my connections through actions, not words. The team as a whole wasn't expected to win more than 5 games, and with 16 to play, it looked like a year of losing was upon us.

The next day I showed up to practice an hour early, only to find that the construction company must've only worked on the facilities near the field, as it looked futuristic. I felt like I was in a city, but there couldn't have been more than 10 people collectively in those glass towers

around me. I began to walk to the cafeteria, where they said a breakfast would be provided, however to my dismay, the food looked absolutely awful. I sat down, alone, and braced myself for the incredibly soggy eggs, bacon burnt to a crisp, and toast that could've been called charcoal. As expected, it was awful. I wasn't going to let my teammates suffer from this, and I began to storm over behind the counter, fueled by nothing but pure rage at whoever made such a meal, if you could even call it that. I began to yell, raving about their cooking and terrible food, when I began to hear a laugh from behind the counter. Turns out, I wasn't the first one there, Dimitri was, and he made sure to let me know about it.

After we had our laughs at my expense, he let me into the kitchen so I could try and make something that could be labeled as "edible" or "food" and as expected, we made a shrine to the culinary arts, a plate surrounded by an aura of glory, however we weren't done with the fun yet. He showed me how he made the plate he gave to me, and we began mass producing them. We also began to bet on who would come in next, because they would be the one to get the culinary masterpiece. After about 20 minutes of hard factory labor, we heard the door open, and we began to frantically look for the masterpiece plate. By the time we had found it, they had reached the kitchen window, ready for something to eat. The mystery man clearly didn't have much patience, as instead of waiting a few seconds for actual food, he grabbed the charcoal toast, ice cold and melted eggs, and bacon that appeared to have been unsuccessfully returned to the pig.

We began to panic, as if they found out we were making intentionally awful meals there would be consequences to face, and in order to give them the masterpiece they would realize that what they grabbed was an intentionally awful breakfast. We decided to perform our walk of

shame over to the table, however to our surprise we found that the one who came in at 4:30 am had met us halfway. Coach Rosier was not, as my parents would say, “in all that good of a mood” about our shenanigans with the breakfast. We held our heads down and handed him the well-crafted masterpiece. “Why are you two even working in the cafeteria, we have a chef?” He asked us, and I saw the pure fear in Dimitri’s eyes. He frightfully led us to the back of the kitchen, where the chef sat in a chair, tied up and blindfolded.

His morale of fearlessness and laughter instantly changed into that of a cornered animal, however there was no fighting back, there would be consequences for taking a chef hostage. Dimitri confessed that I had no involvement and was simply here to eat, allowing me to leave so they could go to his office for a “discussion” which led me to believe he was going to be cut from the team, which would have been a fair assumption for any other late round pick, any except for Dimitri Hurts. Somehow he found a way to stay on the team, and the rest is history.

## Chapter 2: A Vision of Greatness



The noises rang in my mind, repeating and repeating the same electronic sounds, it sounded close yet far, quiet yet ear-shattering, and ignorable yet ingrained in my mind. I had almost forgotten about it, what I'd done, but the words kept echoing in my mind, I couldn't stop them, it wouldn't end, all I could hear was the last words he said to me, and even then, my mind couldn't even make out the words. All of my thoughts ceased to exist in that moment, all but the

repeating electronic beeps, slowly intensifying, this had to be some form of torture, as in that moment I might as well have been in an electric chair. The body had become infested with insects, and my mind began to tear into two, debating what I could do to get out of this, as the lifestyle I had been introduced to weeks before rediscovering him had allowed me to forget what I had done, completing the intended purpose of freeing myself from the guilt I knew would eventually overcome me.

After the first few weeks of adjusting to life in a foreign country, I realized that staying within the little circular neighborhood the team had been arranging for years now was likely the best way of action. I knew at some point, once I finally reached the national spotlight, I would have to leave this little circle and rejoin society, however today would not be the day. I got out of bed, and to my surprise, I was not alone in my room. They surrounded me, yet I was free to move through them, as if I was being swarmed by ghosts of some sort. To my knowledge, our neighborhood didn't have any ghostbusters to call, so I just attempted to go about my day while ignoring the spirits circling around me as I moved about the house. They followed me into my car, however once I entered the cafeteria to find another "Dimitri's Special Breakfast" and even they appeared to be disgusted by the food.

My alarm went off, ending the dream I was having. I made sure to check my room to see if any ghosts were still lingering around, and to no surprise, the breakfast, even when contained to my mind, is a ghost-repeller. I went about my day and eventually forgot about the dream entirely, only recalling the morning after. I had plans to visit some family in Oregon, but those quickly fell through due to my ankle breaking in half during a harsh shopping cart accident at the local grocery store. I spent the next few weeks at home, trying to recover from an injury

sustained in the strangest way possible, and during those weeks I spent a lot of time going over how exactly I got into such a situation. It all began with the fact that Dimitri had once again pranked me, however this time, it was disguised as an innocent request for groceries, as he “needed to rest” at 4 in the afternoon. Trying to be kind and understanding, I went to fulfill his requests.

I entered my car with nothing but pure rage and hatred, however it wasn’t the “start a fight with the cashier” type of rage, it was a more silent, internal annoyance with my circumstances. I began to navigate my way out of the neighborhood, minding traffic and trying to obey the law, unlike the week before, however that is a story for a later time. I pulled into the parking lot and briefly practiced some Spanish before walking in to grab what had been requested of me, which I hadn’t even bothered to read. I read the list, and to my surprise it consisted of: “Chips, cheddar cheese, bananas, water bottles, more....bananas? Potassium extract? What is this list?

To no surprise, the local grocery store didn’t have any potassium extract, however it had plenty of looks to go around. I will admit they were well deserved, as a man with a seemingly normal order plus 30 bananas is a pretty rare sight. I had only prepared for a few things, bringing my own bag that surely couldn’t carry 30 bananas. I grabbed a few bags to hold them, however I simply couldn’t carry all of the bags. There I was, limping out of the store, when a stray shopping cart sent me and the bananas flying through the exit door. I didn’t think I was hurt immediately after, my body was overwhelmed with fear regarding the fact that the bananas broke my fall. I got up to survey the damage when my body was sent back down, even gravity was

disappointed in me. As it turns out, gravity did not care about my bananas, my shattered ankle did.

As I rested in the hospital after surgery, my mind began to leave reality. I fought with everything I had to keep myself from entering an episode while in a hospital bed 3 hours after a major surgery. Sounds began to build in my mind, at first a slow trickle of rain, then transitioning over time into horrific screeching, cornering my conscious mind and surrounding it with pain and mental suffering. I tried everything to stop the noises, as this wasn't the first, and certainly would not be the last time this had happened. My mind again began to split, with one side that I recognized as myself, and another that was unfamiliar yet was consistently present in my day to day life for as long as I could remember.

As with the case in the airport, I was barely able to pull my split mind back together. The constant whirlwind of emotions the season had brought so far continued to pull me into despair. On one hand we had potential, and on the other we had 1 win and 5 losses. Dimitri had finally broken through and made the roster, which was well deserved. After a few team meetings, the discussion came down to a simple yet massive decision that could potentially lose or help us gain millions: do we try and push for winning, or do we just accept the fact that we are simply not good enough to compete? As I and a few others, just over 10, entered the room where my destiny would be determined, I was the only one in favor of pushing for winning. It was a risk that they didn't see the team able to make, however I managed to get the majority of them on the side in favor of winning, mostly thanks to Dimitri being late and bringing attention to my argument.

We met at his house a few weeks after the meeting and whatever else we had done for the day, hoping to try and relax after a tough win on Monday Night. “Only a matter of time before they pull me off of the roster because of the breakfast stuff I did” He said jokingly. “Well, not much I can do about that. Besides, they can’t pull me off now. After that performance, I’ll be in the papers tomorrow! I’m just stoked about it man. Truly a dream come true.” He had begun to rant before I cut him off. “Don’t get complacent. Not much of this is in your control but whatever time you have should be spent trying to gain more of it.” I tried to reassure him. “Only time will tell I guess, but I’ve been at the facility almost an hour before everyone else every single day, I just think that, well, now it’s my time to shine.” He said with hope in his eyes.

The season had travelled in a blur, however the speed of it was not reflective of losses, but a miraculous string of wins. Our even record of 8-8 didn’t look impressive, until you take into account the fact that we were at one point 1-5. One of our wins came against the St. Louis Jaguars, in which Dimitri handled their star corner Jaire Alexander, and I led the defense, bringing the pressure to Devante Carroll. Devante and I had a chat after the game, where I got to see a more human side of his robotic play style and personality. He was a strange man, yet he seemed to have no true flaws to his game. He was accurate, intelligent, had an incredible work ethic, and the rare trait I liked to call the “silent motivator” those qualities had put him second in the MVP race, just behind fellow Washington rookie QB Trent Linsley. Trent was a much more vocal player on and off the field, making sure that you knew who he was and what he brought to the table. Every now and then I ponder how 3 of the top 4 picks all came from the same state, let alone #1 and #3 from the same college and the same position.

We finished off our last opponent of the season, clinching the division even without a winning record. We anxiously awaited the news of our first round playoff opponent, and to our surprise, it was none other than Devante Carroll's Jaguars. Thankfully, since we had won our division, we hosted the game in Mexico City, even though they had not only the better record, but the far more talented team. Our game plan from a few weeks prior was dug out of every player's trash and studied night and day. There was no chance we were losing the game, with all of the effort we had put in to prepare.

At many points in life, one looks back on important events and the many consequences that formed because of them. I find not one event more personally important to me than this game was, for many reasons obviously. Just because of one game and the results it held, my life completely changed due to those results. One of my biggest mistakes came from justifiable confidence, however it was something that I never could have seen coming. The numbers and bright lights had never attracted me before, however I could feel the calling growing.

The casino. A truly magical place where my dreams and desires would be fulfilled. Nothing more than a few \$100s at stake, which would be risky for the average person, however with my stardom and rise to prominence, I was no longer just a part of the crowd. Betting \$500 on our win in the divisional round was a drop of water not in a bucket, but a desert. After the win, I claimed my \$1,200 and spent it on a new TV, and some bananas for Dimitri. "You know I'm serious about building the potassium bomb, trust me man! Even if we blow up the team cafeteria they can't cut us! Just trust me on this one, when have I ever led you in the wrong direction?"

## Chapter 3: Clear Sight



The noises kept going, I had now been standing as still and stiff as a brick for what felt like hours, still staring at the body. It wasn't the body that made me feel the way I did, it was the thought of the action I had performed to put it there, but now the murder and the consequences I could face were the least of my concerns. My legs collapsed and I covered my eyes, they were rattling with pain, as I hadn't blinked in the quarter-century I had spent standing there looking at and internally screaming about the body in the corner of the closet, but now that my eyes were closed, all that was there was the noise. Oh that noise, it kept repeating and repeating and repeating, there seemed to be no stopping it. All of a sudden however, my mind finally split, and the noise stopped.

The act of living out a dream is quite possibly the most frequent pastime the mind takes up when uninterested in its surroundings. The eyes, ears, nose, and most senses feel as if they have shut off, and you enter a faraway land, where you become the person you dream of. Many times I had found myself in that position, where I was simply an average person doing average things. Times had changed however, and the dreams that I had in the past had come true. My life had gone from one of struggle and hopelessness to one of assured luxury, if my newly purchased private jet didn't let you know immediately.

Gambling frequently had gone from an every-other-month activity to an every-single-night routine, one that I wasn't sure whether or not to be proud of. Dimitri had seen the light prior to me, many times trying to stop me from a simple game of poker with a few teammates. I was 23 then, still unsure of what I was and wanted to be, however Dimitri knew his purpose, something I had come to admire. Although I admired his sense of self and purpose, it

made me a bit jealous. He had his entire life sorted out into nice little boxes, while mine was sprawled out on the floor, trying to put itself back together.

I began to use gambling as a way to escape my thoughts, as the constant flow of action and money kept my mind away. I didn't think I was addicted, however looking back on the frequency of the nights and the amount at stake every round, there was simply no possible excuse for why. Although my mind now is a prison of solitude, drifting in an endless void, I can still recall every single detail of my life with exact precision. It is as if time has slowed down, leaving me with nothing better to do than to document my entire life for your reading, that is, if I'm even still alive to write it down.

My gambling problem rooted from just a simple \$50 bet, however the consequences it held were far beyond a \$50 bill on a table. I had begun meeting other people from the league, trying to connect outwards instead of becoming a recluse. Having to spend time with others in order to get closer to deals worth millions of dollars was a sacrifice I was willing to make. I had jokingly recommended that Dimitri was to join me at a prestigious event held in the city with "Don't you know, you need banana bucks to make banana bombs, and you might just end up relaxing on a banana boat" which although incredibly cringeworthy, it convinced him to join me for the night. And as I had jokingly joked in a joking manner, we ended up spending the next day on a yacht in the Pacific.

After our day of retreat, we continued through the playoffs. After our miraculous comeback against Devante Carroll's Jaguars, where the once incredibly vocal and outspoken Kai

Greenfield found his role and played it to perfection, sparking a chain reaction that led to a victory. After the Jaguars came the Texans, a team that had given us our 6th loss of the season in a brutal fashion. We decided that repeating our mistakes was not an option, instead scheming a run-heavy and blitz-heavy gameplan. It somehow worked, leaving us the only team to ever reach a conference championship without a winning record.

History was to be made, as we once again triumphed over a team that had previously defeated us, the Baltimore Ravens. It was the first game in the snow I had ever played, however the more experienced Dimitri stole the show, ultimately being the reason for the victory. Now that we had overcome all of the odds, there didn't seem to be much left to do. Not much remained, just the biggest, most important, life changing, universe destroying, life ending, will bending, unforgettable, Super Bowl. About a week before the game, a prospect from Auburn had come to visit. His name was Desean Goodwell, or as he said, "Dez GW" needless to say, he had a brand of confidence to come with talent the likes of which had never been seen.

He could jump like a basketball player because he had been one, even though he stood at a surprisingly small 6'1. He may have been raised to play basketball, but his speed and jumping abilities made him hard to overlook in football. He possessed the ability to practically clear defenders with his vertical jump, along with speed to rival Usain Bolt. Needless to say, he had the legs of a deity. We could not be too focused on him however, we had to focus on the biggest game of our lives: The Super Bowl. Preparing weekly for games had become a chore, as we had to consistently sculpt a completely new play-style each week. We knew that it would pay off eventually, however the work had begun to take a toll on everyone in the building, from the

coaches at the top to the poor cafeteria workers, everyone was exhausted and ready for the season to end.

As the draining weeks went by, I feared the return of some sort of schizophrenic panic. It had been almost 6 months since the last, however I knew that as I grew older that they would be here to stay. I had made a routine of checking the cafeteria, making sure every single day that Dimitri wasn't behind the counter to protect the poor souls of those exhausted cafeteria workers. As I approached the counter to meet a "misery shift" worker, I found myself all alone in the building. To be fair, it was 3 in the morning, but there had to be *someone* around. Turns out that there was someone: some sort of spirit. It began to speak to me in a strange foreign tongue, however its underlying message was clear.

"Escape the prison of your mind, they are the only thing that confines you." carried shivers throughout my body. I felt time begin to accelerate far beyond what I believed it to be capable of. It felt as if my very soul had been harvested and sold to a timekeeping demon, I could no longer hear my own thoughts. The whirlwind sent my eyes a few inches out of my skull, there was simply no going back now. Suddenly it became quiet, however the spinning continued with an exponential force. It had become dark, the type that you only see late in the night, so late that you know you shouldn't even be awake to witness it. I remembered a certain story told to me years ago, the kind of memory that shoots itself at you every few years. It was simple and brief, but I could not find the meaning of it.

*“After coming across a rock in a field, I called two men to survey it,*

*one being my neighbor, and the other an archeologist.*

*The archeologist studied it for hours, desperate to find the meaning of what it held,*

*however my neighbor only needed a few seconds to determine his meaning for it: just a rock.*

*Sometimes one is best left observing through the lens of a child, the simplest outlook we know of.*

*If you spend your whole life trying to examine every single detail of something, your life becomes just one big test. The Spanish could never find the fountain of youth, but by being the neighbor of the story, you can find one of your own.”*

The spiral continued, however it began to slow down as my focus shifted to the poem and away from it. I began to feel myself falling out of the soul realm and back into reality. I began to recall the point in a certain song, where after 4 minutes of storytelling, the last 22 seconds were a reversed version of the song just before. I couldn't recall the name, but there would be no other way to describe how falling back into reality felt. My back seemed to have been shattered from the velocity, and extremely dizzy couldn't even come close to describing how everything that wasn't broken in some way felt. My wounds began to miraculously heal, as I laid on the cafeteria floor, groaning in pain.

“Everything alright Mr. Washington?” I heard from behind me. “Uh, um, sure. Yeah I’m fine. Just slipped and fell, that’s all. Sorry about that.” I nervously responded with. “Didn’t seem like a fall to me.” the voice assured me as I turned to look for the source of it. “Only you could find a way to end up here like this. We told you to stop, we all support you even though we know how hard it is.” the voice said with a fearful frustration. I looked at my hand, only to see it

bruised from shards of glass, and burns from who knows what. I finally mustered up the courage to look at the source of the voice, none other than my apprentice, Daymond Underwood. He seemed familiar, however my mind seemed to have undergone some sort of time travel. I knew I couldn't just ask him the year, so I had to act delusional.

“Aw man, I.....man, what *yeeeaar* is it?” I said, pretending to be drunk. “Not this again. You were fine just a few seconds ago. I saw you walk in here on both feet, not just one like usual. You’re supposed to be mentoring me, not out there ruining your life. Get it together DW. Please. For all of us.” Those words he had said haunted me. What had I become? Clearly in the future I was some sort of drunken maniac, as there was simply no other way I could’ve gotten in the current situation without some sort of substance abuse.

“I’m sorry...I just...I don’t know.” I responded with, hoping at any minute that reality would come back to me and I’d be back in the present day. It never came however, and the conversation dragged on and on. He began to lecture me when I had had enough and simply stormed out of the room. He yelled to try and get me to return, but it was of no use. I found a car that somewhat resembled mine, and tried to find my keys in my pocket. I knew that at this point in time I had been drinking, something I only did around other people at the casino. Looking back from the void, I can tell that something was clearly wrong with me, at least from the view of someone on the outside looking in.

I made a call to a contact I recognized, “Danny Jackson” a defensive end for what had been the River Hogs, now known as the Monarchs. I had almost forgotten to check what year it

was, and as I did so, I was met with, “March 6th, 2036” it was too clear and detailed to be some sort of episode, and if it was a dream then I must’ve had a curse set on me. I knew deep down that I’d have to accept it, however that would not be an easy task. I decided that the best way to get this off of my mind would be to go to the casino, however without company my mind would simply drift uncontrollably, so I had to call someone.

I decided that calling while drunk and in shock wouldn’t be a great idea, so just texting and attempting to get some information about this new time period 15 years in the future would help me get through the initial shock. There was only so much that I could do, however the solution to all problems has to start somewhere, even if the “problem” is something that you’ve never faced or remotely considered before. I had never been in such a vulnerable position, I mean, at some points I was close, but nothing like this. I began to look through my contacts, trying desperately to find a name I could recognize. I noticed that all of the contacts’ pictures were just different colors. Most were grey and black, some white, but there was one “in color” so to speak. A nice yellow, with the contact listed as “DW-J” which I slowly began to recognize.

I began to read through my past conversations with this DW-J, and it didn’t take me long to realize who this was. During my time floating around through the universe, doing who knows what and picking up an apprentice, there was a son all along. I began a new conversation with him, however he didn’t respond. I was confused for a while, but later I remembered the fact that it was 3 in the morning. I scrapped my previous idea of getting a group together to go to the casino to clear my mind. I had to talk with my son somehow.

I began driving down the road, which I recognized to my own surprise. I made my way back to my house, the upcoming game or team event be damned. I had my own plan, and I wouldn't be easily deterred from it. The first order of business was getting some sleep, a task I easily completed. I was in a rush, hurrying to get back to wherever my son was. I woke up at 9 am, alerted by just a small teeny tiny 27 missed calls from a few different people from the team, all but one I didn't recognize: Juan Rosier. He had called the most, also texting a flurry of messages. I feared my punishment, but it had already come. I checked the voicemail he left on the most recent call, and instead of anger, he seemed a bit sad, almost as if he was talking to me about something personal and dear to him, even though it wasn't.

“Darrius, we've been trying to call you for a few hours. You...may have already seen the news about what happened. We traded you and Will for CJ Washington and Donte Manning. We just felt that this would be the best way to move forward. Coach Staley should be calling any time now to welcome you to the Los Angeles Chargers, but I don't think he has your number. I know you and CJ are close, so you can probably ask him. I know this is rough, and this...it's unexpected and I apologize for that. Hopefully we can get you back on the team at some point.”

Instead of feeling nothing or not having a reaction, I began to panic. I felt as if I had been poisoned, probably because of the hangover from whatever I had been doing while shifting dimensions. There was just no way that I was getting this off of my mind, just none at all. I had to settle on going out with friends. The three I recognized would have to do, and the Diamond Casino a few miles down would be the spot. I let them know, and they were here in an instant. It

felt good to have company, but mostly to get my mind off of the previous....events. I asked Dimitri if he wanted to come along, something he strongly protested:

“If you think I’m going gambling *again* after last time you have to be mad, but if you think I’m going with Devante? You’ve gotta be at some sort of comedy gig trying to get a laugh out of some people. No way I’m putting any money at risk near that guy. He’s a magician.”



## **Chapter 4: Night Owl Doing Only Nigh' Things**

I ignored Dimitri's wishes yet again, choosing to head to the newly completed and highly exclusive *Diamond Casino*. Joined by rivals turned friends, Devante Carroll and Danny Jackson, we entered the casino with a plan, a plan so outrageously stupid there was no chance it could fail.

We had bought disguises in the casino's shop, with Devante taking a clown mask, however Danny and I took massive 7s to wear on our heads. They looked stupid, but at least there was a reason. Even if those inside didn't know our names, our outward appearance reflected wealth and power.

We had planned our route around the many card games they had, beginning with blackjack. We found an empty table and began our gambling tour. Our dealer seemed quiet, likely used to some extreme verbal abuse from drunk customers with the feeling of god flowing through their veins. The room was filled with an extravagant design, one of luxury and prestige. Although *technically* anyone could enter, you had to be decently high up on the prestige graph to get out of the main lobby. Just showing up with two friends for a night was likely going to set me back by a half million, however any price is the right price for a good time. We began to discuss how the games had been going:

“Alright, c’mon, gimme something good man” Danny, or DJ, said with hope, shaking his hands inches off of the table. He was given a king and a 4, not exactly *great*. DJ was a calm and collected man, one of great faith. He came from Nemo, Texas, later attending college in Kansas. I had never heard him swear until the alcohol started flowing, and this was certainly not the first time. “**WHAT THE HELL MAN?!**” he shouted at the dealer, who remained completely stone-faced through his drunken raving. DJ began to make threats, and that was the breaking point for Devante Carroll, who quite literally took matters into his own hands, slapping the rage and anger out of DJ. “I understand. I’m...sorry sir.” he said to the dealer, who nodded without looking in his direction.

I checked my phone to cool off for a moment, however soon I wouldn't be the only one checking the news. "Jonathan Ward breaks all-time touchdown and yards record for a single season" the ESPN headline read. Jon Ward.... the name was somewhat familiar. I asked DJ, and he looked at me like my brain had become replaced with a pinecone. "Jonathan Ward, the tight end from the Golden Eagles, Dez Good's apprentice? You don't remember him? Damn, I didn't know you had that many drinks in your system. Devante, you wanna head over west of the tables and get in on the fun?" he said, transitioning from a lecture and into an offer to buy some drinks for Devante. "Nah I'm... fine. I've had plenty over the last few days." he said calmly. Many people were confused as to why someone of my likes stuck around two calm and collected individuals, but it was mainly for my own sake. I could never tell them that obviously, but as the time went on and the drinks kept flowing, the night got even better.

**"DEVANTE YOU ARE A CHEATER!!"** DJ yelled in a fit of rage. Devante was the smartest among the trio, probably because it was his job to be smart. "Just the way the game goes. Not much I can do." he responded. He always spoke in short and concise sentences, never tipping his mental hand. We weren't playing poker, yet he found the need to try and hide his thoughts. His dark eyes allowed me to see the reflection of the table, the green fabric and brightly colored chips radiating off of his cornea. I must've stared for too long, as eventually he noticed, and I was staring back at myself. "The hell are you doin?" he said in an effort to question me. I was never one to stutter or back down in a conversation, and that wouldn't change today.

"I was tryna see your cards through the reflection of your eyes" I said to him, which he quickly countered. "We aren't playing poker dumbass." he said with a slight laugh. It was funny now that I look back on it, however at the time I wanted to slice his neck open with those very cards. "I'm gettin' bored of this, let's just head on over to the horse racing...area thing." DJ said, attempting to sound formal. As we all left tips for the poor dealer who had had to put up with us, I heard him speak for the first time: "Hey, you, the...tall one. You left all of your stuff." Devante kept walking, as he was the shortest of the group, something we often dogged him for. Me and DJ sort of looked at each other back and forth for a few seconds before I looked at the table. Yep, it was my wallet, my drink, my jacket, and my phone I had left at the table.

As we entered the inside track, where you could bet on all sports, not just horses (something I learned in that very moment) we began to marvel at the pure feeling of wealth radiating from the room. The seemingly hundreds of TVs echoed the same sound across the room. Thursday Night Football, 49ers at home against the Steelers. Although the game wasn't very close, there just simply wasn't anything else happening that night. Jonathan Ward, the tight end that had broken countless records with the Golden Eagles, broke the record for career receiving yards and touchdowns on the same play, one in which all he had to do was run and put out his hands.

I thought back to the headline from my phone, "Jonathan Ward breaks record for yard and touchdowns in a season" and as my brain slowly collected the dots, it truly set in just how drunk I was. I realized that I would be lucky to remember this night, a night already going well. I told the others I wouldn't be drinking anymore for the night, and they looked at me with pure

confusion. I felt a tap on my shoulder from behind me, DJ and Devante trying to get my attention.

“Hey man...that’s not us. We’re back here.” DJ said with a laugh. At that moment, my temper with him was running short. Looking back, I was overreacting. I shrugged him off, and kept walking towards where we’d be seated. Food was being served, so I figured that I’d get some, since money had become less of a question, and more of a statement. A waiter came over to ask what we wanted, a question I wasn’t remotely prepared to answer, along with DJ and Devante. We politely requested a few more minutes, and hastily threw together our orders just in time for the waiter to return.

“Okay, take two, what do you guys want?” he said, seemingly frustrated that a 10 page menu is hard to go through in 30 seconds. We gave our orders and began to wait, waiting on what would hopefully be some high-class “Diamond Premium” cuisine. Unfortunately I’m not that intelligent when under the influence of alcohol, so we will never truly know what the food was like. I made the mistake of leaving the room due to some comments from DJ, a move done as a joke, as there was no way I could survive out there on my own. Although I don’t remember many specifics, he was yelling, I was yelling, we began to fight, ending with us thrown out and Devante sitting peacefully inside.

Two drunk idiots in the middle of a big city, what could go wrong. DJ led me to his car, and just as he had planned, the car alarm began to echo in the silence of the night, just across the street from the police station. As we saw the red and blue lights, DJ found the car that was actually his, and we began to speed away. The shine of the moon was our only guide, the dirt

road we had to choose was dangerous even during the day to the most skilled drivers. Although we had no clue at the time, this was just almost the worst decision we could have possibly made in that situation.

We sped down the road, dirt flying all throughout the sky. We began accelerating past any reasonable speed, however the police behind us gave chase. DJ had thankfully invested in a car capable of 200+ miles per hour, but since we weren't on pavement, all bets were off. We both agreed that we had to get to an actual road, a task that took what felt like hours to achieve. By the time we reached the highway, not only were 3+ cars following us, but it was also 1:57 in the morning, what had we done.

We reached the highway in one piece somehow, and just as we hit pavement, we flew past the cars giving us chase. They simply didn't have the horsepower to keep up with us, and as we made our escape, we rolled down the windows, enjoying the hearts we somehow kept beating through the chase. Surely a night to remember, however in the morning we realized we had done the opposite. At our hotel, I was present, DJ was present, but Devante was late to class. In a panic, we tried calling him, but he didn't answer any attempt to contact him. A few hours later, he texted us that he had been on a plane back to Orlando, apologizing for the scare. What a guy.

DJ flew back the day after, and with the Chargers on their bye week, I had a day to myself. I decided to take on the herculean task of seeing my son for the first time, well, the first time I can remember. I reached out to Dimitri, hoping that the three of us could go and see a

movie, or something of that nature. I got a yes from both parties, so it was time to head out and see my son for the first (real) time.



## Chapter 5: An Accidental Intentional Accident

We met outside of the gas station, and seeing him for the first time was a strange yet rejuvenating feeling. It felt like my life had been completed at that very moment. We began to talk, discussing what movie we'd see, and other specifics we should've had planned hours

beforehand. I made sure to try and immerse myself into whatever the future was, since I was still a few days removed from a 15 year time skip. We spent our time together in the movie theater making small talk and being a bit more obnoxious than we should have been. I couldn't help but be confused about the movie we were watching though.

It was some type of action film, with the main character being a stereotypical "cool guy" and being completely bulletproof. It was a decently funny time, as the trio we had assembled had a good laugh with it. Some people recognized us, something I had completely forgotten to expect. We exited the movie theater just as the sun was setting, and set out for some ice cream. We found a local shop just a few miles away from the movie theater, so we set that as our final destination for the night. It was a simple yet enjoyable plan, one I had apparently used many-a-time before.

As we left the ice cream shop and began to walk through the nearly pitch dark night back to the car, we were approached by a mysterious figure in a dark hood. Dimitri and I moved my son behind me, however even though we stood our ground, he kept approaching. We told him to leave us be, he didn't know who we were. I could tell we were all acting out of fear, even the figure approaching us seemed a bit fearful. It escalated quickly, as the streetlight he walked into shined light onto the knife he was holding. Two could play at that game.

I usually wouldn't have brought anything like this for a night out with my son, but something told me I'd need a gun for the night. Whatever that voice was, I was sure to listen to it a bit more frequently. Even after pointing it at him, he kept approaching, and my immediate and

aggressive counter-attack alerted Dimitri, who began yelling at me to put it down. As Dimitri began to look away towards me, the man charged him, and I did what I had to.

**“OH MY GOD YOU JUST KILLED HIM!”** Dimitri screamed into the silence of the night. My ears rang from the sound of the gunshot, and the groans of agony from the man became louder by the second. “Why....just..how..why??” Dimitri cried out, flustered and petrified. He began to walk towards the man, who had been shot in the leg, now begging for help. I told Dimitri to stay back, to stay away from the man. He refused, so I grabbed him, holding him away from the man. He broke free, and the man summoned the strength to stand up, aiming his knife right at Dimitri. Before I could pull out the gun, my son charged at Dimitri to try and stop him.

**“SHOOT HIM! SHOOT HIM! SHOOT HIM! PLEASE JUST SHOOT HE STABBED ME”** were the last words I heard from anyone that night. I began to blankly fire, struggling to keep my eyes open. After the 10 or so shots had all been used, I surveyed the damage. What have I done. **What have I done.** *What have I done.* What have I done. There was no escaping this. No leaving it all behind, none of that. I had acted foolishly, believing I was too strong, too right, too correct, too infallible. There was no going back now. I had entered my own personal valley of death.

I walked back to the car with my son in my arms, and I laid him to rest in the shed outside of my house. No one could find out about this, and I had to do my best to forget it. I made a vow to myself: “Even if I lose my liver, lose my life, I have already lost my light.” There

was nothing to live for besides short-lived pleasures and temporary happiness, the light had truly left my life. I tried to conceptualize my thoughts through a poem, my hands still shaking.

*“In the dark of the night, I made my mistake*

*I took them for granted because they tested my faith*

*There is only so much one man can do*

*When the light of the night takes control of you*

*And while I sit here crying and drinking*

*My thoughts keep going, yes, I'm still thinking*

*Thinking of the body resting in the shed*

*My baby boy*

*Forever off to bed.”*



## **Chapter 6: Was It Ever REAL?/the value of life**

The noises rang in my mind, repeating and repeating the same electronic sounds, it sounded close yet far, quiet yet ear-shattering, and ignorable yet ingrained in my mind. I had almost forgotten about it, what I'd done, but the words kept echoing in my mind, I couldn't stop them, it wouldn't end, all I could hear was the last words he said to me, and even then, my mind couldn't even make out the words. All of my thoughts ceased to exist in that moment, all but the repeating

electronic beeps, slowly intensifying, this had to be some form of torture, as in that moment I might as well have been in an electric chair. The body had become infested with insects, and my mind began to tear into two, debating what I could do to get out of this, as the lifestyle I had been introduced to weeks before rediscovering him had allowed me to forget what I had done, completing the intended purpose of freeing myself from the guilt I knew would eventually overcome me.

The noises kept going, I had now been standing as still and stiff as a brick for what felt like hours, still staring at the body. It wasn't the body that made me feel the way I did, it was the thought of the action necessary to put it there, but now the murder and the consequences I could face were the least of my concerns. My legs collapsed and I covered my eyes, they were quaking with pain, as I hadn't blinked in the quarter-century I had spent standing there looking at the body. All that was there was the noise, oh that noise, it kept repeating and repeating and repeating, there seemed to be no stopping it. All of a sudden however, my mind finally split, and the noise stopped.

The two sides of my mind began to converse with one another, however my true consciousness was fighting in between them, trying to stay afloat in the flooding room that my mind had become. One side of the room felt guilt and remorse, the other felt as if it didn't matter and that the lifestyle I had temporarily adopted needed to be upheld, and they began to talk among each other. "The need for words has long passed, we have failed our responsibility to keep his mind under control, the noise was our last hope." The Left Side stated calmly. "I agree,

there is no point in words as we have failed, however the noise was not our last hope. There must be something we can do to control it.”

They continued to fight, going from a peaceful conversation to one of built up rage, they were now fighting over my mind. I couldn’t feel my physical “self” anymore, I had become an entity of the mind, no longer bound by the chains of having a body. I could feel what was left of my mind slipping away from me, however my physical senses came back, as I had begun walking and fell. At this moment I knew I was dying, and I could do nothing but reflect on how I had gotten myself into this position. I had tried it all, done it right, however the mind rules over the rich and powerful just as it does the poor and unnoticed. I knew it could’ve been prevented, I could’ve done something to change it, but I had travelled too far into the bottomless pit to climb up anymore, it was over.

The noises and the voices in my mind stopped, and it seemed that all of my stresses had been cleared. I had finally found peace in silence, my mind finally free to move about. I began to see visions, almost as if I was still alive, and even though my body was fighting to live another hour, my mind had already entered the afterlife. I thought back on the many memories I had made throughout my life, and began to try organizing them, eventually reaching the end, or the present moment I was in. After what felt like a few years of drifting in the threads of the universe, I began making a comprehensive story. A chronological overview of my life in a way.

I began to organize these many stories and events, and with them I realized the true value of life. It took 42 years, one murder, one brain aneurysm, and who knows how long drifting

through empty space to find the true value of existence. The value of life is found in the loss of it. Someone is never appreciated until they aren't around to see it. When I first came to this realization, I was fearful that I would either be forgotten, or that my memory would be engulfed by the knowledge that I killed my son, then died in suspicious circumstances. There was no true way for me to know how I'd be remembered, but I felt as if my journey was complete. This wasn't ideal, but I had reached the top of the mountain. I had completed my journey, and I felt a sense of contentment. Just as I had come to a conclusion on recapping my life through my enhanced space dimension memory, I felt a tap on my shoulder.

"I'm guessing you've been here a while." I heard from a voice so familiar I had to know the source, yet it just wasn't quite there. I turned around to try and see who, realizing in that moment I had never tried opening my eyes. As my eyes began to adjust to the world around me, I fell into a temporary paralysis, my mind nailed down. My eyes hadn't seen anything like it. I had spent all of this time surrounded by this beauty, galaxies just a reach of the arm away, star formation in the strangest yet most perfect shapes and colors. I was so stunned by the beauty of it all that I had forgotten about the voice behind me, and they had noticed that too.

"I... assume you don't quite remember me." the voice said with a slight hesitation. I attempted to respond, but every single time I did, my eyes just became enamored with a new shiny and sparkly galaxy in front of me. I noticed that I was wearing a grey suit with a tie, but my legs were....mangled. It looked like my knees had been surgically broken and twisted in some sort of failed human centipede experiment. I made a resolution to close my eyes and turn around, relying on my knowledge of who exactly the voice was.

“Dimitri. Dimitri Hurts if you will. I bet you didn’t expect me here.” he said with a laugh, clearly at my expense. I opened my eyes to try and see what kind of joke this would be, but it was him. He appeared much older than me, causing me to stutter even more. I thought I had killed him, that when the gunshots rang and I ran away from the acts I had committed, he had also perished along with....I’m still not over what happened.

“I understand you’re enamored...with the beauty of this place. I promise you it gets better. Follow me over to the carnival, the greatest thing you’ll ever see.” Dimitri said with a smile and his hand offered towards me. I was expecting us to have to slowly trudge our way through the stars, but he had a much simpler plan in mind. He took us back to Earth, to an empty carnival. I began to converse with him, however we had both passed beyond being human. We no longer spoke with words, we spoke with poetry. Yes, I do know that poetry is made of words, but ours used words not as the premise, but as the vessel of communication. I began the conversation, one not of words, but one of mind, one that I remembered from a song in a distant memory.

*"As we walk, as we walk through this valley of death*

*Listen please listen, listen, listen*

*Don't want to have two way conversations*

*Don't want to have two way conversations*

*But let's put everything on the table*

*Let's put everything*

*We ain't gon' bounce around it*

*We ain't gon' bounce around anything*

*Got my skeletons, you've got yours*

*But let's be honest here*

*This, this don't end with agree and disagree*

*That ain't possible*

*There's just some things*

*There's just some things that ain't right*

*We got to be honest with ourselves*

*Oughta know*

*I know, I know, you know, I know, I know*

*And if you don't then there's something wrong up here*

*In your noggin'*

*We cannot end this with an agree to disagree*

*There is no happy medium*

*That there is nothing, that there is truly nothing."*

He responded in kind:

*"You were never one of great kindness or compassion,*

*never one to call much or check in on anyone*

*You were never one to go out of your way to care for anyone,*

*and no one cared for you as a result*

*You say that we have to be honest with ourselves*

*yet you haven't said a word of truth*

*You were never one to shake dust off of yourself*

*always more willing to leave it*

*Once you passed we all recognized that we had never truly seen you*

*even though we thought we knew you*

*we never truly came close*

*Hopefully in this new life we can talk some more*

*since it simply doesn't end*

*And as you look upon the galaxies*

*the stars in the night sky*

*the words you never said begin to string together*

*you were never a saint*

*but you didn't need to be*

*There was only so much one person could do*

*and I know I've been talking for far too long*

*but I just needed to get it off of my mind. "*

The darkness became more prevalent, and the silence grew as the echoing of his voice began to fade. I began to look at the sky, just as he was. It was beautiful, an ending I didn't feel I deserved. I had been so terrible in every single way, I felt remorse I hadn't fathomed just weeks before I left the mortal plane. I thought back to all of the work I had put in, and asked myself: What was it all for? Maybe this all had a bigger meaning beyond just a pretty night spent surrounded by carnival lights and galaxies.

I'm just too heavily remorseful at this point. I had spent my life trying to be considerate and failing, but with 40 years spent recollecting, I had finally changed. I was invisible now, however I had an eternal night, all to myself. I told Dimitri I would be back, and he silently shook his head. I climbed up the ferris wheel with ease, looking out into the night. Words are a handy tool, yet they can't capture the true feelings something brings unless you're incredibly skilled with them. I was never that lucky, I was just lucky to be alive.

*“In all 21 years, 5 months, and 3 days of my life, I had never woken up so nervous”*

*“Call me before you kill me”*

*“Don't be so hard on yourself, you really do try”*

I tried thinking back to my mistakes, yet they simply weren't there. I had reached a point of pure peace, alone in my thoughts. I could stay here forever, and I believe I will. Now that you and I have reached the present, I believe I should apologize. No, no, it's fine. You don't have to worry about anything, just join me on the copper wheel. I'll tell you about my life story, and you can hopefully remember yours. We'll spend the night having a staring contest with the stars, because after all, there is no blinking when you're in heaven.

*“The night had a strange feel to it”*

It ended just as it had started.

